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## Conservatism

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## Conservatism<sup>\*</sup>

Conservatism does not ask ultimate questions and hence does not give final answers. But it does remind men of the institutional prerequisites of social order.  
(Huntington 1957: 473)

### Conservatism and change

Whether conservatism is understood as the ideological articulation of a reactionary tendency to defend establishment and social privilege or merely a prudent manifestation of risk aversion and scepticism towards grand schemes for improving society, it has coalesced into a body of thought inseparable from the question of how to manage change. As emphasised in a recent study by O'Hara (2011), conservatives do not simply reject and resist all forms of change in social, political and economic arrangements of any given society. Instead they accept that change is inevitable and have articulated a distinct approach to identifying and understanding circumstances in which change might contribute to resolving contradictions and discord in existing arrangements. In doing so, conservatives aim to aid in the preservation of institutions and practices, rather than rendering them unviable and thus tearing them asunder by rejecting any change at all. As O'Sullivan (1976: 9) puts it in his introduction to the 'philosophy of imperfection':

[c]onservatism as an ideology, then, is characterized in the first instance, by opposition to the idea of total or radical change, and not by the absurd idea of opposition to change as such, or by any commitment to preserving all existing institutions.

Willingness on the part of conservatives to accept change where necessary must however be distinguished from accepting any change, or generously promoting it. Neither the radical reactionary nor progressive mind-sets capture the conservatives' outlook on social change. In making any decisions to alter, for instance, the basis for a monarch's authority, the scope of participation by citizens in parliamentary affairs or the extent to which private

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property can be taxed to provide public goods, a careful balance must be struck between a need to adjust disequilibrium in existing social arrangements and the importance of not overestimating the degree to which the *status quo* might be improved upon, as opposed to create worse problems than the ones already at hand: from the French to the Russian and Chinese revolutions, history provides ample evidence of radical change to existing social arrangements producing evils in some instances far surpassing those they succeeded.

From this point of view, conservatism is not a mere negative reaction to social change, brought on in the modern era by the ideational and socio-economic transformations of, respectively, Enlightenment and industrial revolution. Burke, for instance, supported the claims of American colonists against King George III and argued for the easing of the Penal Laws against Catholics in Ireland partly for the purpose of maintaining the British Empire. By compromise and accepting the necessity of some significant change to existing arrangements, he aimed to protect an established order against further disruption (O'Brien 1992). On this view, conservatism constitutes a positive engagement with change to mitigate its destructive potential and to preserve established ways of societies as they actually exist and wherein, in Burke's words, the living bear responsibilities not only to their own generation, and not merely contractual ones, but to those of generations past and those still to come. In this emphasis on obligations transcending the individuals immediately involved in societal interactions we can perceive an early divergence within the otherwise intertwined origins of conservatism and liberalism in Britain: key conservative concepts such as social discipline, deference and corporate solidarity were ones that, according to Wolin (2001: 55), 'liberal thinkers beginning with Hobbes and Locke and continuing in the English Utilitarians were unable to generate from liberal assumptions about free, equal and consciously consenting individuals'. The idea, then, is to conserve to the extent possible, but not absolutely.

Most notably, the preference for society as it actually exists places in the conservative's mind the burden of proof for showing how the benefits of alterations to an existing order will outweigh the potential costs of doing so on those who advocate change, whether they be Jacobin revolutionaries or the social planners that Hayek expected would lead modern society to serfdom. Oakeshott (1962: 196) speaks of 'a world of fact, not poetic image ... a world inhabited by others besides ourselves who cannot be reduced to mere reflections of our own emotions'. An existing society with all its accumulated knowledge and

complexity cannot simply be judged by the standards derived from abstract theories based on *a priori* assumptions of how society ideally should function, a sentiment vividly invoked by Sir Walter Scott:

An established system is not to be tried by those tests which may with perfect correctness be applied to a new theory. A civilized nation, long in possession of a code of law under which, with all its inconveniences, they have found a means to flourish, is not to be regarded as an infant colony on which experiments in legislation may, without much danger of presumption, be hazarded. A philosopher is not entitled to investigate such a system by those ideas which he has fixed in his own mind as the standard of possible excellence (quoted in O'Hara 2011: 64).

Implicit in this attitude towards change is also an 'epistemological doctrine' of conservatism (O'Hara 2011: 24). Unlike liberal and, in particular, socialist approaches to social change, conservatives are less inclined to assume that sufficient information required to successfully undertake large-scale and top-down reforms is readily available to government planners and social engineers. It is with Hayek, in the wake of World War II and the emerging Soviet challenge to liberal order in the West, and with the comprehensive reorganisation of British society by means of government planning and intervention, that the question of epistemology is brought to the centre of political analysis. While Hayek's relationship to conservatism remains complicated there is a similar epistemological scepticism present in Burke's notion of government being inevitably 'shrouded in mystery' and later also in Oakeshott's critique of 'rationalist' social engineers.

An important distinction must also be made between what Quinton (1978) and O'Hara (2011) understand as two very different types of change: organic and artificial. The former, which the conservative would be inclined to accept, refers to change in societal arrangements that can be conceived of as bottom-up, in that it is driven by voluntary decisions made incrementally by large populations, such as the increasing acceptance in twentieth-century Britain of women's role in the work force and a multi-ethnic society. The latter refers to top-down change implemented by a small number of political leaders or planners to which a general population must, often in a relatively short period of time, simply adapt, the archetypal example of which would be the Leninist notion of a vanguard party – or a 'New Class' of experts, or technocrats – claiming for itself the right to interpret and

implement the will of the people. Thus we can conceive of organic change as ‘demand-driven’ and artificial change as ‘supply-driven’ (O’Hara 2011: 74); conservatives in Britain who in recent years have attempted to legislate against the grain by, for instance, suggesting that ‘major behavioural trends’ such as the ‘permissive society’ and mass migration ought to be reversed are therefore arguably reacting against organic change and thus acting in a manner that is ‘futile, wrong-headed and ultimately counterproductive’ (Ibid, 97). The temptation to legislate against the grain finds some self-styled conservatives, including many Conservative Party politicians in the Thatcherite mould as well as neo-conservative Republicans in America, challenging rather than channelling a long-standing Anglophone conservative tradition.

The inherently sceptical attitude towards artificial change is the reason why conservatives sometimes wish to eschew the very notion that conservatism is an ideology. The (positive) definition of an ideology suggests an *a priori* set of values from which general principles and even specific societal arrangements can be derived, and on the basis of which politicians and other decision-makers ought to act through relevant institutions and by available means of persuasion in order to align society with those principles. In the case of the Enlightenment ideologies, these are principles understood to be universally applicable. Ideology thus implies positive action. Where for O’Hara (2011: 6) ideology ‘mediates between philosophy and action’, for MacKenzie (2003: 2) all ideologies embody accounts of reality and how it can be bettered. The argument, for those reluctant to acknowledge that conservatism is an ideology, is that conservatism does not entail or imply the derivation of specific schemes for how society ought to be organised and that it entails a negative rather than positive view of action. While, as suggested by Huntington, conservatism gives us an idea about what institutional arrangements are likely to ensure societal order (and, possibly, which ones will not), implying furthermore that order is a fundamental requirement for any legitimate polity, it lacks a positive vision. However, E H Carr noted that ‘[t]o denounce ideologies in general is to set up an ideology of one’s own’ (quoted in Drolet 2011: 15). Indeed, it is possible to derive from conservatism a general set of beliefs about social change – if any, it should be gradual – and about the virtue of some social arrangements over others, i.e., those in tune with tradition rather than those aiming to reject it. Because policy prescriptions can be inferred from conservative values, just as from liberal and socialist ones, conservatism can profitably be treated as a political ideology standing alongside its main ideological competitors.

An examination of the historical origins of modern conservatism in the wake of the Enlightenment and its crowning achievement, the French revolution, and of a conservative critique of grand schemes for social transformation based on assumptions of a melioristic character of human nature and the existence of universal values, suggests a consistent approach to change which sets conservatism apart from liberalism and socialism, its rival ideological alternatives in the modern era. To discern the defining features of a conservative body of political thought, they must be examined in comparison with, and in contrast to, the ascendant radical and progressive ideological forces of that era.

At least five major schools of radical thought have competed [with conservatives since Burke] for public favour ... : the rationalism of the *philosophes*, the romantic emancipation of Rousseau and his allies, the utilitarianism of the Benthamites, the positivism of Comte's school, and the collectivistic materialism of Marx and other socialists (Kirk 1995: 9).

Liberalism embraces, indeed it constitutes a core component of, the Enlightenment and its attendant belief in an ability to improve society by means of harnessing human capacity for reason, to identify and clearly state universally valid principles and rights on the basis of which an improved society can be organised – (individual) freedom and equality being pre-eminent among these. A dominant strand of socialism conceives in a teleological fashion of a perennial conflict between classes throughout history as inevitably resulting in a final revolution that transcends previously existing class-based societies, however vaguely the nature of that classless end-state may have been articulated by socialists themselves. In contrast to these two competing visions of how society could best be organised in accordance with Enlightenment values, conservatives emphasise the inherent value of existing social arrangements and the importance of ensuring that any change is gradual, with those in charge clearly cognisant of the risks involved in departing from what is tried and tested.

### The anti-revolutionary sentiment

When considering conservatism not only as a body of political thought, but as an ideology with concrete implications for actual political developments across time and space, there is

perhaps no other issue through which we can better perceive the conservative ideology in action than in the conservative's response to revolutionary social change.

Originating in the radical challenges to established order in Europe, conservatism is for Huntington (1957: 458) 'the product of intense ideological and social conflict' where 'men are driven to conservatism by the shock of events' (470). The important role played by (the prospect of) revolution in shaping conservatism is also central to Freeman's (1980) highly critical account of Burke and his defence of the *Ancien Régime* in France. Huntington (1957: 470) is, however, arguing in a somewhat counterintuitive manner about the origins of the conservative mind set when insisting that 'conservatism comes from the challenge before the theorist, not the intellectual tradition behind him', and as a consequence 'conservative thinkers of one age ... have little influence on those of the next'. This argument jars with a general conservative reverence for tradition whereby 'one generation links with another', the necessity of which Burke so eloquently spoke and without which '[m]en would become little better than the flies of a summer'.

This is, however, only a problem if one accords history unduly great determining powers over future events. Clearly the past, i.e., actually lived experiences transmitted over generations, is crucial for any conservative's considerations of whether a contemporary polity is good or bad, and whether proposed change ought to be considered as promising or dangerous. But *contra* Marx's argument in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the history and tradition of dead generations does not, for conservatives, have to weigh like a nightmare on the minds of the living. Conservatives clearly cannot rely on the discounting of history by means of which liberals can proceed to deduce from axiomatic notions of the public good fundamental principles of how society ought to be organised. But because conservatism is inherently pragmatic in terms of the social outcomes produced by an established order, and because it also rejects deterministic conceptualisations of history that hamper flexibility in adjusting to new and unforeseen events that inevitably crop up, the conservative is as capable intellectually to adapt to events as they occur as he is to recognise the merits in what has gone before. *Pace* Tacitus, custom does adapt itself to experience.

The revolutionary vision stands in sharp contrast to the conservative sentiment, is indeed its anti-thesis. Before descending into a Reign of Terror, the French Revolution proclaimed the universal Rights of Man and a future to be defined by liberty, equality and fraternity. A new world order was to be ushered in, so complete in its rupture with the

*Ancien Régime* that even a new way of keeping time had to be introduced whereby the Gregorian calendar was replaced by a new Republican one. The supposed *tabula rasa* created by revolution and regicide was designated Year One (later echoed in Pol Pot's Year Zero, marking the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia) to symbolise a total rejection of the past. Thus Jacobinism and the French revolution was the very embodiment of radicalism as a means to transformation, a persistent theme echoed in many revolutions since. Half a century later, Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* called on the working men of all countries to unite in overturning the history of all civilisation, by transcending past epochs of class struggle between freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, a struggle later conceived of as one between capitalists and workers, to usher in the inevitable and classless society of communism by means of a revolution to end all revolutions. Thus, the major social and political ruptures of the modern era, beginning with the French revolution in the late eighteenth century (if not already with the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation), transitioning through the abortive European revolutions of the nineteenth century and culminating in the Russian revolution of the early twentieth century, all constitute violent reactions against established order that in each case were based on radical premises and utopian aspirations.

The modern revolution is, moreover, a peculiarly Western phenomenon subsequently exported enthusiastically across the world.

Revolutions, in the grand sense, are, as Friedrich says, "a peculiarity of Western culture." The great civilizations of the past – Egypt, Babylon, Persia, the Incas, Greece, Rome, China, India, the Arab world – experienced revolts, insurrections, and dynastic changes, but these did not "constitute anything resembling the 'great' revolutions of the West." [...] More precisely, revolution is characteristic of modernization. It is one way of modernizing a traditional society ... [and] is the ultimate expression of the modernizing outlook, the belief that it is within the power of man to control and change his environment ... (Huntington 1968: 264-5).

Where revolutionaries succeeded in bringing down existing order, radicalism habitually gave birth to terrors greater than those which revolutionaries sought to end. As Madame Guillotine terminated a moment of volatile freedom in France, so did Stalin's Great Terror (an intensification of activities begun by Lenin's secret police) end the dreams of those



who had hoped that Russians could free themselves from centuries of autocracy and despotism they had hitherto endured. Similarly, revolutionary premises would later underpin nationalist movements and waves of decolonisation sweeping across the European empires in Africa and Asia. The Congo's first elected leader, Patrice Lumumba, proclaimed on the eve of independence in 1960, less than a year before his murder at the hands of Belgian and Congolese officers, the beginning of a new struggle for the Congolese, and Africans generally, that would culminate in the fulfilment of all that was aspired to in the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Correspondingly grand proclamations, promptly betrayed, and with hindsight not feasible to begin with, were articulated by leaders across the formerly colonised world. As with previous revolutions, those who managed to cast off the yoke of European colonialism often found themselves saddled with governments and rulers every bit as oppressive as those they had previously endured. Contemplating for instance the legacies of Amin, Bokassa and Mengistu in Africa, and post-colonial leaders elsewhere similarly willing to employ violence and provoke economic ruin in pursuit of personal power, it is not difficult to argue that conditions indeed changed for the worse. At a fundamental level, psychological as much as it is socio-cultural or political, it is the sense of horror when contemplating revolutions degenerating into destruction, even nihilism, which animates the conservative aversion to radicalism and to those grand projects which promise comprehensive change and an end to the ills of contemporary society. The conservative perspective on social change does not hold that any and all change is necessarily ruinous. It is possible to improve conditions of life, but the revolutionary road will not provide deliverance. Indeed revolution becomes for the conservative something 'unthinkable', tantamount to, in Scruton's (2001: 11) rather gruesome analogy, 'murdering a sick mother out of impatience to snatch some rumoured infant from her womb'.

### The origins of conservatism

The roots of an Anglophone intellectual tradition of conservative thinking – contrasting developments in Britain and America with a more reactionary, and radical, form of conservatism emerging in Europe in response to the French Revolution as represented by Maistre and the other so-called Clerical philosophers, Bonald and Chateaubriand – are present already in the Elizabethan theologian Richard Hooker's late sixteenth-century

*magnum opus*, the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Huntington (1957: 480) suggests that in Hooker's *Laws*, written two centuries before Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, are 'delineated every significant strand of Burkean thought'. As demonstrated by Wolin (1953) and Quinton (1978), this is nevertheless a conservative tradition most profoundly shaped by the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke, most palpably by his experience of the ideational and societal transformations in Europe prompted by the Enlightenment and culminating in the French revolution and the violent end to the Bourbon monarchy of Louis XVI. In this sense, Burke's *Reflections* stands as the seminal contribution to what has become an Anglophone tradition of conservatism, the exponents of which are '[united] in identifying Edmund Burke as the conservative archetype and in assuming that the basic elements of his thought are the basic elements of conservatism' (Huntington 1957: 480). In its Burkean form, O'Sullivan (1976) describes it as a tradition broadly characterised by scepticism and pragmatism in its approach to political and social reform. It constitutes, according to Kekes (1997: 356), a 'via media between the dangerous extremes of Utopian [and rationalistic] politics and the [fideistic] repudiation of reason' and stands in stark contrast to the universalism and progressivism on which its rival ideologies, liberalism and socialism, are based.

While Anglophone conservatism is Burkean in its origins it must also be recalled that this tradition contains within itself considerable variation, even within its articulation in an English context. In tying his conservative position in the *Reflections* closely to a specific time and place, Burke espoused rather excited notions of the exceptional nature of the English and their supposedly innate conservatism (and in contrast to the ways in which, on his account, revolutionary fervour had debased the national character of the French):

Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not ... lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century; nor as yet have we subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us... We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility (Burke 1986: 181-2).

The contrast between Burke's grandiloquence and Oakeshott's subtle elucidation of merely a 'conservative disposition' almost two centuries on is significant. For Oakeshott (1962: 183), conservatism is not in the end about any particular religious belief in a providential order or an organic theory of human society tied to a belief in 'a primordial propensity of human beings to sin'. Nor is it, in the English context, about an inevitable connection to Royalism and Anglicanism. Oakeshott's conservative disposition is about 'certain beliefs about the activity of governing and the instruments of government'. In its concrete manifestation it becomes a politics averse to rationalist approaches where 'to govern is to turn a private dream into a public and compulsory manner of living'. It is a vision of government as an umpire of interests in a plural society and not an imposer of uniformity, whether this is uniformity along the lines of a socialism concerned with equality in outcomes or that of a liberalism deducing a system of government from a specific set of ideal values.

Government, then, as the conservative in this matter understands it, does not begin with another, different and better world, but with the observation of the self-government practiced even by men of passion in the conduct of their enterprises; it begins in the informal adjustments of interests to one another which are designed to release those who are apt to collide from the mutual frustration of a collision (Oakeshott 1962: 188).

It is important to note also that key contributors to this Anglophone conservative canon, from Burke to the twentieth-century American political scientist Samuel Huntington, were not primarily philosophers, nor were they straightforwardly conservative in their political allegiances. Burke was immersed in the parliamentary politics and intrigues of his day on behalf of the Whig Party. Indeed, Burke is more appropriately thought of as a statesman, politician and orator than as a philosopher *per se*. Lock (1985: 1) considered Burke 'not primarily a writer or thinker, but a party politician' whose 'rhetorical genius [and] ability to generalise' was such that his *Reflections* continue to be read 'as a classic of conservative political thought'. Even a sternly critical judge of Burke and his intellectual legacy as constituting the primary obstacle to the realisation of Enlightenment ideals, supposedly begetting even the twentieth-century fascist reaction to liberal democracy, Sternhell (2010: 28) considers Burke 'one of the first great intellectuals to make a profession of politics'. Huntington considered himself a strong defender of America's explicitly liberal tradition and his scholarship extended far beyond the realm of political philosophy into

historical and empirical studies of political change, most notably his seminal study *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). Both Burke and Huntington are emblematic of the eclectic and empirically rooted nature of conservatism, by contrast to which a scientific theory of socialism or a Rawlsian theory of justice are in their very exposition fundamentally alien to the ways in which scholars have attempted to formulate the basic contours of conservatism and key tenets of conservative political thought.

### The relationship to liberalism

To fully understand the emergence of a discernible body of conservative political thought, and a conservative ideology constituting a distinct political approach to social and political change, the relationship between classical liberalism and conservatism and the important early linkages between the two ideologies must also be examined. This remains in both the British and American contexts a very complex relationship. One reason why this relationship is often overlooked, and differences between the classical liberal and the conservative often exaggerated in political discourse, is that conservatism becomes conflated with Toryism, and liberalism, certainly in its post-war incarnation, becomes defined primarily by its emphasis on individualism and negative freedom. This tendency is in the case of liberalism exaggerated by a selective reading of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* which ignores important caveats to the abstracted individual (what in recent times comes to define the 'neo-liberal' Smith) in his earlier and less widely read *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Hence Preece's (1980: 3) reference to Smith as the 'most commonly maligned and misrepresented of thinkers'.

Understanding the conservative tradition in Britain as merely defined by its dominant Tory elements, i.e., its emphasis on organism, corporatism and collectivism combined with a defence of monarchy, makes it difficult to understand the relationship between (small-c) conservatism and a Conservative politics as championed by many in the Conservative Party since the ascent of 'Thatcherism' in the 1970s, and by the New Right with which the Thatcherite project became associated in the 1980s. Concepts like organism and corporatism are clearly discordant with the neo-liberal tendencies of the New Right. Conversely, when conservatism in America becomes defined as merely a *laissez-faire* liberalism based on an abstracted reading of Locke (and Smith), ignoring the Locke who by invocation of the 'ever judicious [Richard] Hooker' defends English medieval tradition (Preece 1980: 16), it becomes difficult to discern the fact that British and American strands of conservatism, each

with a complex relationship to, and anchoring in, classical (Whig) liberalism, have more in common than is generally assumed. It is this anchoring in Whig liberalism which, for Preece, ultimately sets the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ nations apart from other Western societies.

On this reading of the interwoven history of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ liberalism and conservatism, the key historical context and ideological move out of which conservatism emerges is the desire to conserve the (Whig liberal) values and arrangements of the Glorious Revolution rather than those of the *Ancien Régime* and absolutist monarchy. To conserve this settlement in Britain, a proto-conservative like Burke was to some extent obliged to defend a set of classical liberal values. In fact,

English conservatives no less than English liberals accepted the important role for Parliament established in the settlement of 1689 – in their case more because they valued continuity than because they had confidence in popular self-government (Lakoff 1998: 441).

This places Burke closer to Locke than his liberal detractors give him credit for and remains insufficiently recognised by many conservatives in the modern American tradition who trace the values of the American republic back to a controversial and one-dimensional understanding of Locke’s liberalism. In this context, Lakoff (1998: 442) argues that Burke, like Tocqueville, can best be described as a ‘liberal conservative ... leery of abstract dogmas and of all else that smacked of *l’esprit de système*’.

In Britain, where ideas of divine right had held little sway [...] what was being conserved was the orderly institutionalization of Whig ideas of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 [...] the England which Montesquieu [for whom Burke expressed great admiration] had described as the nation *par excellence* of constitutional liberty [...] [E]ven the most Tory Duke of Wellington recommended government “on liberal principles” and numbered *The Wealth of Nations* among his favourite books (Preece 1980: 8).

Leading Tory thinkers of that time – Burke, the Marquis of Halifax, Lord Bolingbroke – all ‘wrote in the new liberal context expressed most completely by John Locke’ (Preece 1980: 9). What the exponents of this emerging conservative tradition had in common was a

‘desire to reconcile liberty and authority’; they ‘admired ... the principles of the Lockean constitution’ but were also ‘concerned to limit its potential excesses’ (Ibid, 10). Concerns shared by these British conservatives and Whig liberals are important as they make it possible to understand how attempts by one ascendant grouping of modern conservatives – ‘dries’ in Thatcher’s Conservative Party and neo-liberals in Reagan’s Republican Party – to realign economic policymaking in Britain and America more closely with classical liberal principles need not be understood as a radical rejection of the status quo. That status quo being the collectivist settlement emerging out of World War II, subscribed to in Britain by both One Nation Tories and Gaitskellites, and the broad consensus in favour of the New Deal in America emerging in the wake of the Great Depression and attendant progressive policymaking following the war (during decades of Democratic domination of Congress and the White House). The aims of these modern conservatives were rather generated by a desire to rediscover classical liberal principles originally shaped in symbiosis with industrialization and expanding capitalist power, and on which stable democracy was deemed to ultimately depend.

Zuckerman (2008), in his recent study of the history of American conservatism, is wrong to suggest that attempting to ‘subvert and overturn’ the New Deal legacy in America is driven by radical rather than conservative sentiments. After all, the New Deal emerged out of a modern American liberalism manifested in the work of Dewey, channelling T.H. Green and Hobhouse rather than Locke and Smith; a modern liberalism which, through Bentham, becomes ‘a friend of radical rationalism’ and, through Mill, ‘an ally of relativist social democracy’ (Preece 1980: 19). The ways in which the New Deal era transformed the meaning of liberalism in America, from one denoting its classical origin into one signifying egalitarian progressivism and even social democracy, explains why the post-war conservative project in America is considered more radical than it really is. This, even if aspects of the Reaganite (as was the Thatcherite) programme was unduly influenced by the ‘rationalist version of Locke’s studiously complex philosophy’ as represented by the French and American Enlightenment (20).

The at times close affinity between an Anglophone conservatism and strands of liberalism represented by Lakoff’s ‘conservative liberals’ is furthermore illustrated by the Kantian notion, popularised in a rather different liberal context by Isaiah Berlin, of the ‘crooked timber of humanity’ which no genuine conservative would aim to straighten. It

remains a complex and at times contradictory relationship, as evidenced by both Conservatives and Republicans in recent decades aiming for a radical restructuring of existing society and the socio-economic organisation on which it is based. Therefore it is also necessary to consider the question of whether Conservative Party politics following Thatcher, and Republican Party politics following the ascent of the first Reaganites and then the neo-conservatives, can be considered legitimate heirs to the long-standing tradition of Anglophone conservatism.

### Core components of conservatism

To define the nature of a conservative ideology it is necessary to confront a formidable scholarly scepticism regarding the pedigree and merits of conservatism as a coherent body of thought. This is a scepticism originating in the fact that, according to Wilson (1941: 40), conservatism is a political ideology 'weak in its statement of purpose'. Disregarding at this stage political developments specific to Britain's Conservative Party and John Stuart Mill's slight about it being the 'stupid party' it is important to note that normative accounts of conservatism, and of conservatism's standing in the pantheon of political thought, as put forth by conservatives themselves often begin on the defensive. Symptomatic of this approach is Scruton's *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2001). He notes in the very first paragraph of this widely referenced text the commonplace criticisms of conservatism as being devoid of genuine essence, core beliefs and vision. According to such criticism, conservatism constitutes instead an attitude of 'mere reaction ... procrastination ... [and] nostalgia.' According to Honderich (1990), the conservative is ultimately lacking in morality on account of his utter selfishness, an accusation echoed in Eccleshall's (2003: 54) claim that conservatives 'all favour a society in which certain inequalities are preserved, and in condemning purposive politics their intention is to ridicule the egalitarian ideals of their opponents'.

In response, Scruton maintains that conservatism is in fact both coherent and 'reasonable', and not merely a poor substitute for a systematic theory of politics – what Lionel Trilling (1950: ix), in reference to American conservatives, memorably dismissed as 'irritable mental gestures which seem to resemble ideas'.

Conservatism may rarely announce itself in maxims, formulae and aims. Its essence is inarticulate, and its expression, when compelled, sceptical. But it is capable of expression, and in times of crisis, forced either by political necessity, or by the clamour for doctrine, conservatism does its best, though not always with any confidence that the words it finds will match the instinct that required them. This lack of confidence stems not from diffidence or dismay, but from an awareness of the complexity of human things, and from an attachment to values which cannot be understood with the abstract clarity of utopian theory (Scruton 2001: 1).

This tendency to define conservatism in defensive terms, by arguing against its purported deficiencies, implies an ideology quite distinct from both liberalism and socialism. It suggests to a much greater extent a pragmatic and even tentative approach, or, as Oakeshott would have it, disposition to politics and societal organisation generally. This defensiveness comes about because, arguably, conservatism lacks a 'substantive ideal', making it in Mannheim's (1952) memorable phrase 'a politics without ideals' (*Wunschbilder*). In a similar vein, Huntington (1957: 457-8) suggests that '[n]o political philosopher has ever described a conservative utopia'.

For conservatives, however, avoiding the articulation of any prescribed and specific order or set of preferences that are universally applicable is not an inherent weakness. Rather it equips conservatism with a sensitivity and adaptability which, as an ideology, makes it particularly suitable to account for politics in culturally and socially diverse settings very different from those in which the Enlightenment ideologies arose and where, in a state of flux, momentous decisions are forced. Indeed, the essence of conservatism is articulated more forcefully and lucidly in times of crisis where the status quo is fundamentally challenged, as in Burke's *Reflections* and Huntington's *Social Order*, perhaps even in the cultural criticism of Scruton's *England: An Elegy*. For conservatives there is, in this sense, clarity in the inherent pragmatism of their approach to politics which arguably provides an advantage in adapting to changing circumstances and in remaining a relevant ideological approach across a range of socio-cultural settings. Conservatism becomes particularly suitable for accommodating cultural and political diversity in ways that, liberalism and, especially, socialism, cannot. This is notably the case if we extend our view beyond Western societies and examine conservatism as it applies to the rapid changes that have transformed the formerly colonised world.



Postcolonial societies have in many ways remained resistant to modernisation. Despite continual attempts at transformation, they are still in many important respects characterised by traditional attributes such as deference to authority and hierarchy, the imperatives of religious duties and familial obligations and a lingering respect for traditional knowledge and ways of social and official conduct. They retain conservative principles more so than they have ever come to approximate ideals of liberal individualism, socialist collectivism or other variations on the ideological and political themes of progressivism. Thus, conservatism offers a framework for understanding and engaging with the formerly colonised world that is very different from the liberal and Marxist foundations on which Western thinking about colonialism initially depended, as in the ambivalent views on imperialism found in the works of Mill and Marx and in the unequivocal critiques by Hobson and Lenin. Compared to the liberal focus on the (abstracted) rational individual and universal values, and the socialist reliance on an inevitable march of history towards a communist utopia in the context of a rationalist collectivism, conservatism can accommodate a wide range of politics and societal characteristics where, for Kekes (1997), most of the values constituting modern liberalism are actually incompatible with a genuine commitment to pluralism.

Conservatism's ability, as a pragmatic rather than universalist ideology, to accommodate diversity can be traced back to Burke who:

defended Whig institutions in England, democratic institutions in America, autocratic institutions in France, and Hindu institutions in India. Indian institutions, he warned, must be based upon "their own principles and not upon ours," denouncing those ... who "subverted the most established rights and the most ancient and most revered institutions of ages and nations" (quoted in Huntington 1957: 463).

But in order to move beyond the commonly acknowledged scepticism and pragmatism, as well as a general aversion to radicalism, inherent in conservatism as a 'disposition', the hallmark components of a conservative ideology, without which we lack a clear and positive understanding of the concept itself, must be identified. In synthesising a range of existing definitions into a coherent whole, Huntington (1957) evaluates three theories of conservatism: the aristocratic, the autonomous and the situational. According to

the aristocratic theory, conservatism is fundamentally a reaction to a unique historical moment, i.e., the reaction of the late eighteenth-century ‘feudal-aristocratic-agrarian classes’ to the French Revolution. The autonomous definition does not connect conservatism to any specific class. Rather it defines conservatism as an ‘autonomous system of ideas’ based on ‘universal values such as justice, order, balance, moderation’. The situational definition, which is the one Huntington ultimately favours, understands conservatism as originating in a ‘distinct but recurring type of historical situation’ in which an established order is fundamentally challenged and where conservatism ‘is that system of ideas employed to justify [that] social order’ (Huntington 1957: 454-5).

Lest this situational definition be understood as a justification for *any* social order, we should note that conservatives in the Anglophone tradition would and could not endorse absolutist monarchy nor totalitarian rule in the way that Maistre and other proponents in Europe of a reactionary anti-liberalism could in principle justify the unfettered Divine Right of Kings and even theocracy (Maistre’s ultramontanism). The origins of Burkean conservatism in a Britain shaped by the Glorious Revolution effectively rendered meaningless any such justification for absolutist rule. After all, Wood (1991: 98) described Britain as the European monarchy with ‘the most republican constitution’ – what Montesquieu called ‘a republic disguised under the form of monarchy’. The main advantage of the situational definition is that it avoids the aristocratic theory’s inability to accommodate forms of conservatism, including non-Western ones, unrelated to the historical and cultural context of the French Revolution, and also the difficulty arising with the autonomous definition which makes it impossible to draw a proper distinction between conservatism and its rival ideologies on the issue of universal values.

What Huntington (1957: 456) identifies as six core components of ‘the conservative creed’, and which he suggests also constitute the ‘essential elements of Burke’s theory’, remain useful as a general definition of conservatism and for evaluating its relevance as an analytical approach to, and normative prescription for a conservative politics. Firstly, ‘[m]an is basically a religious animal, and religion is the foundation of civil society’. From archetypal conservatives like Burke to modern ones like Alasdair MacIntyre and Robert George, legitimate social order is sanctioned by the divine. The anchoring of society in a divine order serves to check the inevitable hubris encouraged by (Enlightenment) ideologies placing mankind at the centre, or on top, of an order which man himself ultimately sanctions.

Secondly, '[s]ociety is the natural, organic product of slow historical growth'. When deformed by revolutionary fervour and thus divorced from the accumulated wisdom of the ages – Burke's 'bank and capital' – institutions lose legitimacy and cannot last. Likewise '[r]ight is a function of time' in the sense that rights cannot simply be proclaimed, as have been rights proudly issued forth by supranational organisations like the United Nations and the European Union. As Scruton (1991) argues, legitimate and therefore enduring rights can only be derived from the traditions and customs of a society in which people live and which they can therefore hope to properly understand and genuinely accept. For conservatives, the local and national tend always to carry more weight than does the supranational and universal. This in turn has important implications for conservatives' preferences as regards international politics and foreign policy in an increasingly globalised world, of which Britain's persistent scepticism towards the EU project and America's tendency towards unilateralism are recent examples.

Thirdly, '[m]an is a creature of instinct and emotion as well as reason'. The excessive faith placed by Enlightenment thinkers in rationality provokes hubris and encourages reforms doomed to fail as they are predicated on unrealistic and overly optimistic assumptions about a human nature which is inherently fallible and characterised by a propensity for evil (Kekes 1990). The fallibility of human nature is for most (Western) conservative thinkers rooted in the Christian teachings of the Fall of Man and Original Sin, reflecting a perennial pessimism about human nature that is characteristic of the conservative mind set and evident in works as diverse as Sophocles's *Antigone*, Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Discourses*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Bradley's *Ethical Studies* and Santayana's *Dominations and Powers* (Kekes 1997). 'Prudence, prejudice, experience, and habit' are, according to Huntington, superior foundations on which to build a durable social order because '[t]ruth exists not in universal propositions but in concrete experiences'. Fourthly, '[t]he community is superior to the individual'. Because 'rights of men derive from their duties', it is not possible to pass judgement on any social arrangement merely by asking how it conforms to a set of universal ideals. Rather it is the case that each society, each regime and each particular situation must be judged on its own merits, that is, in the context of its specific historical development and in the context of the duties and obligations, as well as rights and expectations, inherent in that historical context.

Fifthly, '[e]xcept in an ultimate moral sense, men are unequal'. Social arrangements inevitably produce complex hierarchies (formal and informal) including classes, orders and groups. These are, *pace* Michels's 'iron law' of organisations an inevitable characteristic of all social organisations. Political philosophies that cannot accommodate inequality are unable to account for societies as they actually exist and always have existed. *Contra* Eccleshall, this recognition is not primarily about vindicating inequality but about the ability of conservatism, as an ideology and as politics, to engage with perennial features of human societies as they exist through the ages. Sixthly, following Burke '[a] presumption exists "in favour of any settled scheme of government against any untried project"'. Because, as Wilson (1941: 42) so succinctly states, '[m]an's hopes are high, but his vision is short' it is necessary to accommodate an intrinsic risk aversion in any account of social action and proposed reform of an existing order. The higher the reach of ambition and the bolder the promise of improvement, the greater is the risk of failure. While arguments in favour of changing the world, as famously Marx in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, can certainly be justified they must be based on realistic, as in empirically grounded and historically sensitive, expectations and not an *a priori* reasoning from which derives abstractions such as *Homo Oeconomicus* and the Rights of Man.

The language and terminology preferred by conservatives has changed, as have modern societies. The religious tenor has faded, but the conservative's concern about how to forge legitimate order in societies inhabited by fallible human beings, and where grand projects for improving life's conditions are bound to fail, remains the key concern. Thus, it is within the broad historical and ideational parameters of this Anglophone conservatism as outlined by Huntington that a diverse range of British and American conservatives attempt to articulate a conservative politics in the twenty-first century.

### Conservatism today

With massive social change throughout the twentieth century, produced by technological advances, world wars, decolonisation and secularisation, came inevitably also significant changes to modern interpretations of conservative traditions, including conservative politics in Britain and America. These two strands of modern conservatism are useful for illustrating how conservatism has remained a complex and sometimes contradictory body of political thought as it has adapted to changing social and political circumstances on both sides of the

Atlantic. The main challenge for British and American conservatives has revolved around how it is possible to articulate a vision for a supposedly radical reorganisation of society and the economic foundations on which it is based, i.e., the neo-liberal and market-driven reforms associated with conservative politics during the Thatcher and Reagan eras onwards, while at the same time claiming the mantle of conservatism and the centuries-long tradition on which it is based. While in some instances there has been continuity in sentiments and policies, there have also been sharp breaks with traditional conservative beliefs.

Writing in the dying days of Major's Conservative government, when a terminal crisis of British conservatism was regularly predicted and which the subsequent landslide election victory of Blair's New Labour in 1997 seemed to confirm, Gamble (1995) argues that modern conservative policies since Thatcher have undermined the very pillars of a Tory hegemony which had ensured that the Conservative Party dominated British politics for most of the twentieth century. This was a Tory hegemony defined by a defence of state (which included in the post-war years its substantial provision of welfare and security), union, property and empire, its 'characteristic ideological themes' being constitutionalism, unionism, anti-socialism and imperialism (Gamble 1995: 9). For Gamble, the defeat of Heath and ascent of Thatcher resulted in a likely irreversible repudiation of this tradition, thus 'hollowing out' the very pillars of Tory England. The new Conservatives showed much less inclination than did their Tory predecessors 'to be bound by precedent and convention', turning instead established state institutions into a major target for reform. They paved the way for devolution and saw the electorally important link with Ulster Unionists crumble, thus placing the future of union under a cloud of uncertainty. Their sharp turn towards neo-liberal economic policies produced not only confrontation with the political opposition and public sector workers but caused internal rifts inside a Tory party often in the past inclined towards protectionism and the 'corporatist bias' characteristic of Macmillan's and Heath's One Nation Toryism. The already pronounced decline of empire forced the Thatcherites into a difficult position internationally, attempting a fine balance between an increasingly subordinate reliance on its crucial alliance with America and an increasingly difficult relationship with Europe.

These developments makes it increasingly problematic to claim that British conservatism as defined by Conservative Party policies represents, rather than breaks, with a

greater Anglophone tradition of conservatism. And it is not at all clear whether there is a way back from this break, to reconnect with that longer-standing tradition.

The old trajectory of Conservative politics is burnt out and cannot be revived. Thatcher was right in her perception of this. What is not clear is whether her fifteen-year reign over the Party has provided the basis for an alternative tradition that can in the future restore Conservative political hegemony. The Thatcherite revolution may not have been radical enough. Many of the old institutions were assailed but few were fundamentally changed. Most are still in place and are hostile towards the Thatcherite project. But the strength of the Thatcherite legacy is that, although it is now strongly criticized from almost every side, there are few coherent programmes for undoing it or going much beyond it (Gamble 1995: 24).

This verdict remains instructive to this day, not least in the sense that leading British politicians, from Blair and Brown to Cameron and Clegg – ‘Thatcher’s children’ as Simon Jenkins famously styled them – have been seen to maintain rather than challenge the new political landscape forged during the Thatcher years. The Conservative Party’s electoral fortunes have since of course revived, bringing the party back into power in 2010, albeit in coalition with Liberal Democrats. But two years into the first Conservative-led government since the New Labour victory in 1997, after which followed the longest period in modern times for Conservatives in the political wilderness, it remains difficult to see exactly how Cameron’s Conservatives could effectively reconnect with that older tradition of British conservatism which in the past ensured political dominance. The fact that the Conservative Party is at present reliant on the Liberal Democrats for staying in government makes the likelihood of such a prospect even less clear and further serves to confirm the notion that post-Thatcher politics have become increasingly ideologically muddled.

In America, the recent tribulations of the Republican Party, and of the eclectic and wide-ranging forms of popular conservatism from which it draws its main electoral strength, suggests a similarly confusing situation as regards the future of a coherent and distinct American conservative ideology. Long before the upheaval caused in Republican ranks by the populist and ideologically incoherent Tea Party movement, as well as by the increasing rightward shift of Republicans in Congress which has been the primary cause of increasing political polarisation in Congress over the last decade, American conservatism has

experienced a series of important shifts and transformations. President Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal constituted a watershed moment in American politics, heralding a generation of Democratic and progressive domination of national politics and transforming the social and political landscape in the process. The traditional conservatives of the 'pre-New Deal' era, most prominently represented in the staunch opposition to the New Deal by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, receded from the forefront of national politics. For conservatism to make a comeback at the end of the turbulent 1960s, amidst cultural counter-revolution at home and war abroad in Vietnam, it would have to reinvent itself.

While it is important to acknowledge a shared cultural and historical heritage of British conservatives and their counterparts in the American colonies, as most notably chronicled by Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1955), it is also important to recognise the vast differences between the socio-cultural contexts in which a conservative ideology develops on either side of the Atlantic, thereby avoiding attempts to crudely graft a British Tory tradition onto a wholly different society in America. Beyond some similarities in sentiments, vastly different social circumstances inevitably made for divergent intellectual and, especially, political developments in Britain and America in the twentieth century. Charting the American conservatives' quest to identify a 'viable heritage' on which to draw strength intellectually and to thereby promote a plausible political ideology, Nash quotes the conservative German émigré William Schlamm on the immense task facing American conservatives in this respect:

The specifically *American* experience of life ... is indisputably a fierce yen for institutionalized "progress" by utopian legislation and industrial gadgetry. Individual Americans, like Calhoun and Adams, may have known better; the American *species* (to the extent that there really is such a thing) is, of course, populist rather than conservative – and for this very forceful reason: America happens to be the only society in creation built by *conscious* human intent, ... and developed, by Europeans *tired* of Europe's ancient commitments, and determined, ... each in his own way, on a "new beginning" (Nash 2006: 291).

As such, the American soil was never suitable for a mere transplantation of the British conservative tradition.

Key events in reshaping and defining the modern American conservative mind-set, producing by the late twentieth century a near-hegemonic and ideologically heterodox neo-conservatism, are for Drolet (2011) the great social and economic changes ushered in with the New Deal in the 1930s and culminating in the counter-cultural eruption of the 1960s whereby the very foundations of America's society seemed blatantly challenged by radical progressives and socialists, civil rights activists, anti-war protestors and others advocating a subversion of the (conservative) social norms characterising the, by comparison, socially stable 1950s. Whereas conservatism up until World War II can primarily be characterised by a combination of localism and populism at home and isolationism in its approach to international affairs, coexisting rather tenuously with an East Coast big business or 'country club' conservatism (later the so-called Rockefeller Republicans), it grew increasingly radical from the 1960s onward. Indeed, when considering the post-war development of a modern American conservatism, it makes sense to think of it as 'counter-revolutionary' (Nash 2006: 295-6) given that American conservatives aimed to roll back the progressive (as opposed to classical) liberal state erected since the New Deal. In this sense, modern American conservatives share an attitude towards politics, as well as a rationale for action, that is comparable to that of Thatcherite conservatives in Britain attempting to radically reform or uproot the collectivist institutions and Keynesian intellectual underpinnings of the British post-war settlement.

However, the introduction of a significant libertarian strand of politics into American conservatism with Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater's Republican primary election triumph against the moderate New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller in 1964 (although followed by a disastrous presidential election in which he lost by a landslide to the incumbent Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson), and the subsequently successful conservative populism of the Nixon and Reagan administrations, lacks any similarly powerful counterpart in British politics, even when considering the fundamental challenge to Tory tradition posed by Thatcher and her co-ideologues. The neo-conservatism of the G. W. Bush administrations of the early twenty-first century, as well as the recent impact of the Tea Party in producing a more combative conservatism amongst the grass-roots activists across the country and in Congress, further exemplify the distinctness, if also increasing ideological incoherency, of an American conservatism today. While too marginal a phenomenon to triumph electorally, conservative libertarianism remains influential as evidenced by the significant minority of



conservatives supporting Texas Congressman Ron Paul in his presidential bid during the 2011-12 Republican primary campaign.

Finally, it is also necessary to recognise an important European link to modern American conservatism, distinguishing America from a British context in which One Nation Toryism and an Oakeshottian ‘disposition’ exerts a residual influence even into the era of the New Right. Post-war American conservatism became profoundly influenced by European émigré scholars who had fled the demise of liberal democracy in Weimar Germany and across Europe in the interwar years. Leo Strauss is perhaps the most important among these émigrés considering his significant intellectual and political influence on a whole generation of American ‘neo-conservatives’, many of them influential in the foreign policy of Republican administrations from Reagan to G.W. Bush (cf. Drolet 2011). The ranks of these neo-conservatives were bolstered by a Trotskyist Left disillusioned by Stalinism, and also by anti-communist Democrats like Norman Podhoretz and Jeanne Kirkpatrick who abandoned a Democratic party they saw as increasingly weak in the face of the Soviet threat abroad and ‘anti-American’ cultural subversion at home. The neo-conservatives infused American conservatism with a more radical and perhaps even crypto-reactionary character. This remains a serious and frequently raised accusation which has its origins in the intellectual indebtedness of Strauss to Carl Schmitt, the prominent and later infamous scholar of Weimar and Nazi Germany. It is in post-Cold War American foreign policy that the legacy of a much popularised (and vulgarised) Straussian neo-conservatism might best be discerned. While this aspect of modern conservatism is less relevant for understanding foreign policy developments in Britain, given the decline of empire, it constitutes a vital ideological component of America’s rise to superpower status in the context of the Cold War, of the triumphalism defining the post-Cold War era and of the ‘War on Terror’ following the terrorist attacks of ‘9/11’. It has been said that, for neo-conservatives, ‘it is always 1939’, suggesting an urgency and determination in the American disposition and conduct of foreign policy that is shaped by a traumatic historical experience and has promoted a tendency towards American ‘exceptionalism’ characterised by a ready reliance on military might and unilateral action in international affairs.

The ideological ambiguity that has come to characterise both British and American conservatism was perhaps an inevitable outcome of the eclectic and historically contingent nature of conservatism both as a body of political thought and a political ideology. Even

though conservatism can be considered as an approach to managing change and preserving tradition, rather than a mere vindication of inequality, it remains by comparison to liberalism and socialism hampered by lack of a positive vision according to which the ideology can be clearly evaluated and which contributes to a sense of ideological, if not necessarily intellectual, elusiveness. Whether or not this is the case, conservatism's historical lineage is well established, its judgement on revolution and radicalism for conservatives themselves vindicated by history and its import as an alternative understanding of modernity and social change to those offered by the triumphant ideologies of the Enlightenment undeniable.

### Further reading

Three seminal contributions that are useful introductions to conservatism and the history of conservative political thought are O'Sullivan's (1976) *Conservatism*, Quinton's (1978) *The Politics of Imperfection* and the sections on 'the adaptability of conservatism' in Freedman's (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory*. Green's (2004) *Ideologies of Conservatism* is the more recent analysis of conservatism in the twentieth century which also belongs to a core of texts anyone wishing to familiarise themselves with conservatism ought to read.

Scruton's (2001) *The Meaning of Conservatism* ranks among the most vigorous and important defences of (an Anglo-Saxon) conservatism by a self-styled conservative thinker, whereas Honderich's (1990) *Conservatism* is one of the most accessible critical accounts rejecting the essential arguments put forth by conservative thinkers. Holmes's (1996) *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* and Sternhell's (2010) *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* are particularly illuminating accounts of reactionary undertones in conservative thinking, and in anti-liberal and anti-Enlightenment thought more generally. While these accounts target primarily the reactionary conservatism emerging in Europe, and therefore speak less directly to the pragmatic Anglophone tradition of conservatism outlined in this chapter, they are valuable in that they highlight key liberal concerns about a slippery slope in conservative ideology towards reaction.

Given Burke's prominence in Anglophone conservatism, his biography is central to the development of conservative political thought. O'Brien's (1992) *The Great Melody* is an unconventional and empirically rich biography providing important insights into Burke's thoughts on colonial Ireland, America and India. Lock's (1985) *Burke's Reflections on the*

*Revolution in France* engages with Burke's thought in the context of the arguably most important, formative event in the history of conservatism as ideology – the French Revolution.

A longer perspective on conservative politics in Britain is provided in Charmley's (2008) *A History of Conservative Politics Since 1830* and Bale's (2011) *The Conservative Party*, charts the transformation of the Conservative Party from the Thatcher years to its return to power under Cameron's leadership. Jenkins' (2007) *Thatcher & Sons* is a valuable account aimed at a broader readership of the legacy of Thatcherism as manifest in the politics not only of the Conservative Party but also of New Labour. O'Hara's (2011) *Conservatism* contains a recent elaboration on the conservative worldview that can be traced from Burke to Oakeshott, emphasising the central task of conservatism as that of managing change. Ötsel's (2011) edited volume, *Reflections on Conservatism*, contains an up-to-date examination of the intersection between conservative thought and politics from a pan-European perspective.

In the American context, Kirk's (1995) *The Conservative Mind* attempts to produce a 'canon' of conservative thinkers from Burke to Eliot that can ground and therefore give meaning to a conservative mindset in the New World. Nash's (2006) *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* explores important developments in post-war American conservatism. These two books remain the pre-eminent contributions to the history of conservatism in America. Gottfried (2009) provides a provocative and heterodox account of a traditionalist American conservatism which has been eclipsed by the neo-conservatism characterising recent Republican administrations and post-New Deal politics more generally. Drolet's (2011) *American Neoconservatism* provides an up-to-date history of neo-conservatism, its philosophical foundations and its implications for politics beyond America's borders.

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